

501.9.31
1793
S I R,

*A circular letter sent to
Dissenting Ministers*

THE few following Questions are most respectfully offered to your Consideration.

I. It is universally agreed among us, that ONE PRINCIPAL Ground of our dissent is a conscientious refusal to acknowledge ANY earthly ecclesiastical Usurpations, as believing that JESUS CHRIST is the SOLE head of his Church. What authority then can ANY mortal have, to COMMAND our observance of such a day as HE may appoint, for any purpose, which HE MAY CALL religious?

II. Is it not the height of Arrogance and Presumption, if such a command is accompanied with a declaration, that the FAVOUR OF GOD is annexed to obedience to it, and HIS WRATH and INDIGNATION to disobedience?

III. Is it not TYRANNY, if PUNISHMENT is THREATENED to those who may not obey it, and who do not believe it to be, as it is called, a RELIGIOUS AND NECESSARY DUTY?

IV. Would not therefore a compliance, by observing THAT day, in our Assemblies, be a DEVIATION from our principles?—Would it not be, in some degree, giving up the liberty where-with CHRIST has made us free, and wilfully entangling ourselves with a YOKE OF BONDAGE?—Would it not be giving the honour, DUE TO CHRIST ALONE, to a mortal, and tacitly acknowledging an EARTHLY HEAD OF THE CHURCH?—This has, indeed, on past occasions, been inadvertently done, but is that a reason why it should be repeated? In this age of examination and light, as well as of danger to religion, ought we not rather to make a FIRM and UNITED stand, against ANY, EVEN THE LEAST, encroachment on the rights of Conscience?

But are there not still OTHER Reasons for our refusal on this occasion?

I. Are we all agreed that it is a JUST and NECESSARY War?—On the contrary, is not ALL War inconsistent with the CHRISTIAN Character; except it be perhaps that which is STRICTLY defensive?

II. What WELL GROUNDED trust can we have, that the Almighty will vouchsafe a SPECIAL blessing, and HIS ASSISTANCE ON OUR ARMS, and that BOTH BY SEA AND LAND?

“HE SEES WITH EQUAL EYE, AS GOD OF ALL.”

III. Is it not worth consideration, whether a request of THAT kind, offered to the GOD of PEACE and LOVE, would not, at least, border on IMPIETY?

IV. We should be shocked, and instantly refuse, if the Archbishop was to send us his form of prayer, which is COMMANDED FOR ALL PLACES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP, as well as Churches and Chapels, and OUGHT we not equally to disobey a Command which VIOLATES OUR RELIGIOUS INDEPENDENCE, which DICTATES a set of POLITICAL, as well as religious sentiments, and which therefore, no mortal whatever can have a right to issue?

Strongly impressed with these ideas, the Writer hereof, would as soon, had he lived in the time of Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego, have bowed down to Nebuchadnezzar's image, as he would religiously observe THIS day which is COMMANDED. If he even thought the occasion suitable, he would not do it on THAT day, but on SOME OTHER. But he desires not that his conduct or sentiments should influence others; He only presumes to offer the above as SUBJECTS FOR CONSIDERATION to his brethren in the ministry, relying on their candour for an affectionate unprejudiced reception of them, and (as he thinks he feels their great importance) not doubting of their being as maturely weighed, as any subject connected with religion requires; and that then every one will honestly act as he is persuaded in his own mind.

It is requested as a Favour, that you will communicate the contents hereof to such other Ministers as you meet, for perhaps some, from various causes, may not have received it,

I am, SIR,

Yours most respectfully,

A Brother in our Holy Profession.

March 31, 1793.